

# Ireland moves to centre of world rural health

**WONCA's 2022 World Rural Health Conference in Limerick will be a showcase for all that is best about Irish and world rural practice, writes Liam Glynn**

**IN OCTOBER 2019** the 2022 WONCA World Rural Health Conference was awarded to Ireland. The ICGP, the University of Limerick School of Medicine, and the Rural Island & Dispensing Doctors of Ireland are hosting the conference from June 17-20, 2022 in a unique joint partnership. There is an extensive list of collaborating organisations including the Scottish Graduate Entry Medical Programme (ScotGEM); EURIPA; the National Centre for Rural and Remote Medicine (UK); the HRB Primary Care Clinical Trials Network Ireland and the Association of University Departments of General Practice in Ireland (AUDGPI). The 2022 ICGP AGM will also be held concurrently with the WONCA World Rural Health Conference.

Ireland has one of the highest rural-based populations in Europe. The figure appears to be on the increase as the new working arrangements triggered by the pandemic have given many people new opportunities to live outside major urban centres. This reverse of the depopulation of rural communities has also been triggered by their resilience seen during the challenges of Covid-19. Recent research conducted in collaboration with the discipline of general practice at the School of Medicine in UL has demonstrated that rural areas were advanced in terms of their sustainability, and were organised and effective in responding to challenges with positive health and economic outcomes during lockdowns.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic has generated renewed vigour in re-imagining life on the periphery as an attractive place for people and businesses to work and live.

The mission statement of the conference is: "We believe passionately that by people coming together and working together and sharing ideas, we can change attitudes, lives, health and ultimately, the world." The conference will provide a unique crossroads for a diverse community of GPs, practice nurses, students, researchers, policy makers, health managers, and educators which will translate into positive and resilient change for the health of communities.

It will be a vibrant and respectful conference, where reflection, analysis, honesty, collaboration and action occur and memories and experiences are made. Recommendations will be published in the form of a 'Limerick Declaration' on rural health.

The theme, 'Improving Health, Empowering Communities' will explore how communities can be empowered to improve their health and the health of those around them. We will hear from 1,000+ participants from across the world in sectors including health, science, engineering, the arts, and NGOs. This conference is intended to foster a high level of meaningful dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders. The conference sub-themes are broad and inclusive:

- Needs, challenges and opportunities – rural health sector
- Strengthening community systems and effecting change for the benefit of our environment
- Community-engaged health professional education and innovations in medical education
- Indigenous, migrant and refugee healthcare needs and social accountability
- Roles of educational institutes in community health and empowerment
- Pre-hospital care and rural communities
- Empowering practice nurses in their work with communities.

An international advisory group has been gathered to help us develop the global element of the conference. This is chaired by Dr John Wynn-Jones, a renowned global GP leader.

The WONCA gathering and the ICGP AGM will be a face-to-face conference with an additional virtual stream. This will be an ideal opportunity after the turmoil of the last two years to meet with colleagues and reflect on how we have risen to the many challenges of COVID-19. During the pandemic Irish general practice often led from the front.

While rural healthcare is at the heart of this conference, it is clear that themes including educating healthcare leaders, the environment, the role of the practice nurse, indigenous, migrant and refugee healthcare, and the role of universities will resonate with people wherever they work.

We are inviting abstracts involving studies or ideas relevant to the conference theme. These can be submitted through:

- Oral presentations
- Moderated poster
- Conference and pre-conference workshops
- RED (Rural TED) Talks: Talk about your passion, idea, project, or thought
- A short video showcasing your life/work/passion/idea.

Awards for best presentations in all these categories will be given, as will an overall best presentation award. We welcome all participation and look forward to welcoming you to Limerick in 2022. Please email [WRHC2022@ul.ie](mailto:WRHC2022@ul.ie) with any queries or go to the website [www.woncarhc2022.com/](http://www.woncarhc2022.com/) 

**Liam Glynn is professor of general practice at UL and chair of the conference organising committee**

Conference Organising Committee: Prof Liam Glynn (chair); Dr Peter Hayes, Monica Casey, Kevin O' Connor, Brad Williams, Dr Patrick O'Donnell (UL); Fintan Foy, Dr Diarmuid Quinlan, Claire Collins (ICGP); Dr Jerry and Teresa Cowley, Dr Frank Fogarty, Dr Pat Harrold, Dr Billy O'Connell (Rural Island & Dispensing Doctors of Ireland); Dr John Wynn-Jones (WONCA Working Party on Rural Practice); Dr Robert Scully (deputy director, ScotGEM).

Reference

1. Fisher T. 2021. How remote communities turned the challenges of peripherality to their advantage during Covid-19. [Accessed 11/9/21 2021]